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ABSTRACT

This document, which is intended for staff development managers, senior and middle curriculum managers, student services managers, and teacher trainers in further education (FE) and higher education throughout the United Kingdom, summarizes the experience of nearly 20 further education colleges and adult education services in the United Kingdom in developing and implementing staff development strategies and practices to improve student retention. The following topics are discussed: the role of staff development in boosting student retention rates; principles and working hypotheses (messages from the research on student retention, staff development and professional development, strategies for managing change, and development of working hypotheses); staff development (awareness raising and information giving; tutor development, teaching skills and understanding, action research, and development of business support staff); a case study from Lambeth College; outcomes of retention strategies at 14 FE colleges; and other major elements of successful staff development for student retention (rolling programs of teacher education and induction; courses to develop specialist skills; tutor development programs; peer observation, feedback, mentoring, and coaching; professional support and leadership from curriculum managers; and systematic teacher development programs to address local priorities). Eleven figures are included. The bibliography contains 52 references. (MN)

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ED 417 347

Staff development for student retention

in further and adult education

Paul Martinez, Julia Houghton and Marysia Krupska

FE matters

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widening participation

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About the authors

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Julia Houghton is the Organisational Development Manager at Lambeth College and is actively engaged in taking the College towards Investors in People status. She has worked for over 20 years in the secondary, FE and HE sectors. Her initial subject specialisms were language and literature, with a particular interest in Caribbean literature. Over the last eight years she has moved into teacher training, management training and staff development. She has developed a portfolio of workshops which she delivers both in-house and externally. Recently she has been involved in exploring strategies to improve retention and is presently investigating ways to improve teaching and learning.

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Widening participation

Widening participation seeks to ensure the access, progress and success of all students. FEDA's Widening Participation programme helps providers respond to and implement the recommendations of the Kennedy Committee. Our research, training and publications identify and disseminate what providers can do to move the pockets of good practice in the sector from the margins to the mainstream.

Summary

This report addresses two central paradoxes. We acknowledge that student retention is an important issue. We now know that student experience of college plays a significant role in decisions to continue or abandon programmes of study. It is fairly obvious that teachers are central to this experience. And yet, in the hurry to adapt, change, improve and implement, we do not always prioritise staff development.

The second paradox occurs in our treatment of teacher and managerial learning. We hold that student learning is our core business. We devote enormous energy to identifying and resolving difficulties in student learning. And yet, we tend to treat staff and managerial learning as relatively unproblematic and straightforward.

The report is based on the experience of almost 20 colleges and adult education services and includes an extended case study from Lambeth College. It contains accounts and analyses of successful staff development strategies and practices drawn from a wide variety of institutions. It shows that staff development for student retention:

- provides a key and integral part of college strategies to improve student retention
- follows a 'professional development' model
- is highly context specific
- works best when it forms part of an overall institutional strategy to improve student retention
- is complex and multi-faceted.

Moreover, the experience of the colleges and adult education services reviewed here, suggests very strongly that staff development will be most effective where a number of different approaches are employed to complement, support and reinforce each other. These approaches are:

- awareness raising and information giving
- rolling programmes of teacher education and induction
- courses to develop specialist skills
- tutor development programmes
- business support staff development programmes
- peer observation, feedback, mentoring and coaching
- professional support and leadership from curriculum managers
- systematic teacher development programmes to address local priorities
- action research.

They will be valuable for:

- staff development managers
- senior and middle curriculum **managers**
- student services managers
- teacher trainers in further and higher education.

1 Introduction

This report reviews the experience of a number of managers, teachers and other staff who have developed successful strategies to improve student retention rates. Its focus is staff development and it is designed to complement another publication: *Improving student retention – a guide to successful strategies* (Martinez, 1997).

Both publications draw on experience of the same group of colleges and adult education (AE) services. The focus of the guide is, broadly, the curriculum, student support and managerial initiatives which comprise college retention strategies. Here, the discussion is concentrated on issues of staff development.

This separate report has been created for five main reasons:

- Staff development issues are sufficiently important to warrant a separate publication.
- While there may be some overlap, the readership of the two publications is likely to be different.
- It would not have been possible to do justice to the wealth of good and innovative practice in staff development without compromising the balance of the more comprehensive guide to successful strategies.
- Staff development issues are sometimes addressed almost as an afterthought; the exclusive focus here is intended to give them much greater priority.
- Retention strategies will be much less successful than they should be, if they fail to address issues of professional development.

Objectives

This report is designed to:

- disseminate successful and innovative practice in staff development
- review the staff development dimension of successful student retention strategies developed by a number of colleges and adult education services
- relate this discussion of practice to on-going discussions concerning learning, professional development and the management of change
- develop a robust model for the staff development dimension of retention strategies.

Scope and definition

The apparently straightforward question: 'What is staff development?' is in fact difficult and contentious. Within the sector, definition problems are reflected in the huge variety and range of job titles. Staff development practitioners are known variously, as HRD managers, staff development managers, officers or co-ordinators, personnel or HRM managers, teacher trainers, professional tutors, INSET co-ordinators and occasionally curriculum and staff development or quality and staff development managers.

Diversity of job title is matched by diversity in organisation, priorities, patterns of activity, degrees of devolution of budgets and accountabilities, levels of resourcing, avowed purpose and, indeed, what should count as staff development in the first place.

Discussions of staff development also intersect with a number of more theoretical debates concerning the nature of professionalism and professional knowledge; the initial, post-entry and continuing development of education professionals in general and teachers in particular, teaching standards, qualifications and standards for qualifications, competence versus capability in approaches to teacher and manager education and assessment; models of effective teacher training; the relationship between teacher development and organisational change and, again, what should count as staff development in the first place!

In order to provide an appropriate focus and to strike a balance between unmanageable comprehensiveness and narrow concentration on training courses or conferences, this publication adopts the following formulation. The staff development reviewed here comprises organised activity designed to reinforce, extend or change attitudes, skills and behaviours within the context of improving student retention. It thus includes activities both on and off the job, accredited and non-accredited, long and

short, at whole college and at team level. It subsumes the concepts of education and training and focuses on the activity itself rather than who 'owns' it.

This approach does, however, exclude staff development which is not organised, (i.e. which is undertaken individually for private or professional reasons) or which does not have as its object the improvement of student retention.

As in other work, the terms persistence, completion and retention are treated as more or less synonymous like their opposites – drop-out, non-completion and early withdrawal. Unless otherwise specified, early withdrawal or drop-out means students who do not complete the courses or programmes of study for which they originally enrolled, and who leave college. It is thus a more comprehensive definition than that used by the English Funding Council which looks at completion only from the first census date. Successful completion, therefore, includes those students who complete their courses/programmes, even if they do not achieve their qualification aims. Non-completion includes all students who fail to complete, irrespective of their reasons and includes students who leave because of a change of their employment status.

To avoid wearying the reader by repetition, the term 'college' will generally be used to include adult education services and centres. Where this general practice changes, it will be obvious in the context of the report.

A note on sources

FEDA has been working with student retention issues over the last four years. During this time, we have organised a number of conferences, seminars, projects and publications. A database of some 600 entries has been created of individuals who are interested in and/or working on student retention issues in adult and further education.

In May 1996, all the individuals on the database and all the college senior curriculum managers in England and Wales were invited to participate in a project. The criteria for inclusion were quite simple:

- a record of development on improving student retention
- demonstrably successful outcomes arising from that work.

Colleges selected for inclusion presented their work at a number of conferences between October 1996 and June 1997. This report is, effectively, a presentation of this work and they are collectively referred to as 'project colleges'. Reference is also made to more recent successful work in colleges and adult education services over the last 18 months. Finally, the report highlights the experience of Lambeth College where the college's retention strategy is premised on a staff development strategy and is particularly rich and fully articulated. The Lambeth section of the report (Chapter 4) has been written by Julia Houghton and Marysia Krupska from Lambeth College.

2 Background

Student retention – messages from research

Very briefly, the conclusions drawn from research by FEDA and by others are that:

- Student persistence and drop-out are significantly influenced by the experience of study and learning: colleges and adult education services can improve retention rates.
- Successful strategies to improve retention are very diverse. Different colleges have different cultures, student and staff profiles, curriculum offers, etc. While there may be some similarities across the sector, the precise mix of objectives, strategies and interventions is likely to be unique to each college.
- Colleges which have achieved the most significant improvements have linked a 'bottom up' with a 'top down' approach to student retention.
- Although retention strategies differ from one institution to another, the process through which they have been developed seems to be fairly similar:
  - acknowledgement of student non-completion as an issue
  - investigation of the specific local causes for non-completion
  - the development and application of retention strategies across the whole or part of the college
  - evaluation of progress and demonstrable success in improving completion rates
  - continuing development of retention strategies.
- Most successful strategies embody elements of college transformation. Starting with a number of different ways of formulating issues, most colleges end up addressing issues of cultural change, raising staff and student expectations, and questioning or revisiting basic, taken-for-granted assumptions about college mission and purpose.

Staff development and professional development

At the risk of enormous over-simplification, and for the purposes of this publication, two broad and somewhat paradoxical messages can be extracted from the largely separate literatures on staff and professional development.

The main thrust of the literature on staff development has been the imperative to:

- link training and development to organisational goals and priorities
- identify and allocate key accountabilities and responsibilities
- ensure that appropriate needs identification, planning, delivery and evaluation mechanisms are in place.

These themes are more or less commonplace within the literature and find arguably their fullest expression in the standards for Investors in People awards, which the majority of British colleges have either achieved or aspire to.

The two main underpinning assumptions of this approach appear to be :

- organisational goals need to take priority over professional or personal ones
- a more or less exact analogy can be drawn between core staff development processes and rational decision making or problem solving models (see the table on the next page).

  (The models depicted here can, of course, accommodate some variations in practice, but the parallels are clear.)

However, discussions of professional development in general, and the development of teachers in particular, have different preoccupations. Putting to one side some current and rather lively debates around competency, capability and standards, the main themes tend to focus on the difficult process of professional development.

Figure 1: Comparing staff development and decision-making models

Staff development model	Decision-making model
1 **Trigger:** annual review phase of planning cycle; new or revised college goals; problem or under-performance identified; new skills; knowledge or behaviours required.	1 **Issue awareness**: a need or opportunity exists for development; there is a gap between actual and intended performance.
2 **Identification of needs** arising from organisational or team review; personnel planning or appraisal.	2 **Issue formulation**: information gathering, filtering and rationalisation; identification and agreement of key issues.
3 **Creation of staff development plans** to satisfy identified needs either internally (coaching, mentoring, in-house training) or externally (conferences or courses), including budgets, timescales, allocation of responsibilities and, often, success criteria.	3 **Generation of possible solutions** and implicit or explicit selection criteria.
4 **Rolling programme** of staff development activity.	4 **Selection** of solutions on the base of implicit or explicit criteria.
5 **Evaluation** of activity leading to annual review and recommencement of cycle.	5 **Implementation, review and recommencement** of cycle.
(Martinez)	*(Bazerman, 1993; Johnson and Scholes 1993)*

In particular, a number of researchers have identified:

- the complexity, speed, and unexpected or unanticipated nature of many professional tasks and hence the corresponding complexity and wealth of necessary propositional knowledge ('know what') and the 'common sense' ability to apply that knowledge ('know how')(Eraut, 1994)
- the affective dimensions of learning in general and professional learning in particular (Barton et al, 1994; Guskey and Huberman, 1995)
- the length of time, breadth and depth of experience, and extent of reflection and active learning necessary to develop professional expertise (Schon, 1987; Chown, 1996; Ecclestone, 1996; Elliott, 1996)
- the difficulty of securing significant change in teacher behaviours and teaching methods particularly where these are associated with school improvement strategies or strategies to foster and promote more active student learning (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Wasley, 1994)
- the gap between staff development activity and carry over in changes in classroom practice, and the consequent need for sophisticated and complex training methods (Joyce, 1988; Hodkinson and Issitt, 1994)
- the need for supportive conditions to promote learning in the workplace including: opportunities to work with and learn from others; open communications and a willingness to question assumptions; participative decision-making and shared power and authority; variety, autonomy and choice in work roles and tasks (Smylie, 1995).

MANAGING CHANGE

Strategies to improve retention rates are about securing and managing change. The people driving retention strategies in project colleges acknowledge quite explicitly that the changes that took place were deep, lasting and important. Indeed, most of them came to identify the need for fundamental changes in ethos and culture.

There is a large body of writing about change management. Again, at the risk of considerable over-simplification, the most prevalent and widely adopted approach could be described as a process model. A convenient survey and summary of the model can be found in Vrakking's overview of the literature (1995). The recipe for the successful implementation of change is as follows:

- good communication and information
- training
- emphasis on learning as part of the change process
- top down and bottom up communication
- adoption of a project management approach
- powerful leaders and support from opinion formers
- measures to avoid problems of 'group think'
- creation of support
- prevention of resistance (if possible)
- support from line management

WORKING HYPOTHESES

Four working hypotheses can be extracted from this all too brief survey of background material.

The retention strategies reviewed here have certainly been successful (see pp41-2) and according to the colleges involved, staff development played an important part in this achievement. On the assumption that this is correct, we might expect to find evidence of the following:

- a process for developing strategies which broadly reflect the model of problem identification and resolution outlined above
- difficulty in effecting substantial change in teaching behaviours and methods
- a consequent need for sophisticated, comprehensive and well supported professional development programmes
- the location of staff development within a process of change which broadly follows the implementation model described above.

3 Staff development

Awareness raising and information giving

Two of the most widely applied staff development interventions were awareness raising and information giving. There seem to have been three general aims. First, awareness-raising meetings sought to ensure that all staff knew how retention issues affected the college. They intended, secondly, to make retention an issue which influenced the behaviour of all staff. Thirdly, all staff would be encouraged to develop or participate in strategies to improve retention. Awareness raising took a number of forms but essentially involved communicating the following to quite large groups of staff:

- the workings of the funding methodology
- the funding implications of student persistence or withdrawal
- colleges' internal planning and resource allocation procedures
- corporation, college or departmental priorities for retention and any associated objectives and targets
- details of any changes to locally determined policies or procedures intended to improve retention.

With some variation, this sort of awareness-raising activity took place in almost all the project colleges and adult education services. Less frequently, additional information was provided to 'dispel myths' about retention, for example: information on research into student persistence and drop-out, or about successful strategies employed in other colleges.

Oldham Community Education Service

The precise content of awareness-raising sessions varied according to local context but the briefing sessions implemented by Oldham Community Education Service are representative. These contained inputs on:

- the FEFC (Further Education Funding Council) and how it works
- the financial position of courses run in the previous year
- the implications of student persistence and withdrawal for the viability of those courses
- the need to recruit and place students on appropriate courses
- the importance of study techniques and support mechanisms
- new or refined procedures for guidance, induction, the follow-up of non-notified absence, course review and the introduction of retention targets.

In a few colleges, notably Knowsley Community College, the awareness-raising activities took on some of the characteristics of a campaign, with the reiteration of key messages through meetings, staff handbooks, induction procedures, staff newsletters, staff development sessions and posters. For a full discussion of the Knowsley Retention Project see *Student retention: case studies of strategies that work* (Martinez, 1996).

South East Essex College

In most of the project colleges awareness raising was linked to more focused and quicker internal communications. The content of briefing sessions for tutors at South East Essex College illustrates a number of similar information sharing strategies. From mid-August onwards, tutors are briefed on:

- any changes to policies (admissions, fee remission)
- the number of offers to students by type (conditional, unconditional, progressing)
- enrolments to date and projections for enrolments
- any changes to accommodation
- any changes to enrolment processes and documentation.

From anecdotal evidence, and using as a crude yardstick the number of times FEDA has been asked to contribute to awareness-raising sessions, most colleges and rather fewer adult education services have by now undertaken some sort of awareness-raising activity.

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TUTOR DEVELOPMENT

In terms of frequency and volumes of resource, the most important aspect of staff development for retention is undoubtedly tutor development. Typically, programmes of tutor training or development have gone hand in hand with the introduction or refinement of tutor handbooks, calendars or programmes of tutorial activity, tutor role and person specifications, standards for tutorials and new or revised policies for tutoring, induction and guidance.

Bexley College

Tutor training at Bexley College concentrated on:

- the development of study skills
- action planning and review
- the use of college-wide documentation

and was supported by a checklist and tutor handbook.

South East Essex College

At South East Essex College, as part of a thorough and meticulous action research project, a number of strategies which would improve the experiences of a large cohort of full-time adult students were identified. Tutors became central actors in the strategy and an extensive staff development programme was created to develop tutor skills, knowledge and behaviours. The programme was developed by a project group of experienced teachers together with a member of the college's Professional Education Training Team and the Head of Professional Development.

The staff development programme rationale and timetable are set out on the next two pages.

Figure 2: South East Essex College staff development framework

Staff Development Framework

for Tutors of Adult Returners

Course Description	Target Group	Time of Year
Introduction of Adults to the Student Centred Learning Environment ***Adults who's previous experience of learning was probably within the traditional classroom environment often find a return to study difficult because of the change in teaching and learning methods. This course will aim to look at ways to help tutors introduce the Student Centred Learning approach to their adult students.***	Everyone	March
Focus on the Adult Learner ***What are the specific needs of the adult learner returning to College, how can the tutor support their learning and what other College support mechanisms are in place?***	Course Leaders & Tutor (Raise awareness)	Mid April
Interview Skills ***Adult students often come to College with a preconception of what course is right for them. This course will aim to develop interview skills to enable you to interview adult returners successfully and place them on appropriate programmes of study.***	Course Leaders & Tutors involved in interviewing	April / May
Study Skills for Adult Students ***What study skills do adult returners in particular require and how can they be incorporated into the programme of study?*** Planning a Successful Induction Programme ***Many Course Leaders already plan successful induction programmes for their adult students, which incorporate the right balance of College and course information. This course will help you share their ideas/practices and merge them with your own programmes of study.***	Course Leaders	May
Funding Systems and Support for Adult Students ***This course will aim to provide a background to the tutors of adult students how the funding and admissions process works in practice. It will be intended as an awareness raising exercise for tutors to provide them with enough background knowledge to refer the student to the appropriate College support service, rather than to enable the tutors to give advice themselves.***	Everyone involved with Adult Students. Aim to raise awareness of funding mechanisms for mature returners.	May & June (Specialist Interviewers) August (Tutors & new staff)

Course Description	Target Group	Time of Year
Using the Student Organiser with Adults ***Adult students often fail to miss the point of action planning and the Student Organiser, yet they are the ones who often need it most. How can you introduce the Student Organiser to your students in a positive and realistic way?***	All Personal Tutors & New Staff	End of August
Helping Students make the transition from College to Work/University ***Adult returners are often given a lot of guidance onto appropriate programmes of study when they first approach the College. Yet when they are ready to take the next step, guidance can be rather sporadic. How can this transition be made easier?***	All Personal Tutors & New Staff	End of August to the beginning of September
Control or Management? ***How to deal with adult students***	New staff and anyone who will find it helpful	New staff induction
Work Placement Provision (Benefits & Pitfalls!) ***How to develop the confidence of adult students to find a work placement, problems with the benefits agencies and how to help your students overcome them easily!***	Course Leaders & Personal Tutors	October (Depending on DFEE)
Communication & Listening Skills for Tutors ***How to be sympathetic & supportive to your adult students.***	All tutors	October
Assignment Writing for Tutors of Adult Students ***Assignments are often copied across from the 16-19 programmes to adult courses, regardless of their appropriateness of content for the mature student. This course will be aimed at writing clear structured assignments which will help build the returners' confidence.***	Brief Course Team Leaders & provide them with a package of material to be used within the team.	November

Tutor development programmes were also introduced at Tameside, Grimsby, Hastings and Loughborough Colleges.

Tameside

As well as organised training opportunities, several colleges and AE services introduced mentoring or coaching programmes. Thus, at Tameside, the introduction of more or less compulsory training was accompanied by the creation of a team of tutor mentors to provide one-to-one support for tutors.

Kent Adult Education Service

At Kent, a mentoring system has been introduced for part-time teacher/tutors. Experienced tutors are invited to become mentors and trained in peer observation, facilitation and feedback skills. The mentoring process comprises:

- initial discussion
- encouragement of those being mentored to reflect critically on their teaching
- observation by the mentor
- detailed feedback
- creation of an action/development plan
- follow-up by the mentor.

These arrangements look similar to appraisal processes in many colleges but innovative features include a considered separation of line management functions from mentoring activity, the focus on part-time tutors and the payment of part-time tutors to act as mentors. Currently some 400 part-time tutors are being mentored, including everyone appointed since the scheme started, tutors who have referred themselves and some who have been referred.

TEACHING SKILLS AND UNDERSTANDING

Further education colleges

Within the project group of colleges, there were initiatives to improve aspects of teaching and promote learning in three main ways:

- rolling programmes of general teacher education
- specialist training
- systematic development programmes to address local priorities for retention and achievement.

Plymouth College of Further Education

Plymouth College of Further Education provides an example of the first approach. The college's teacher education unit runs a rolling programme of teacher training. Teachers can opt into or be referred to the programme. Individual and collective training needs are identified through teaching observation by the head of department and peer observation. Peer observation is by a team of trained observers who provide individual private feedback to teachers and identify general training needs to the staff development manager.

The tutoring role apart, development of specialist skills for the teaching role seems to have occurred fairly infrequently in FE. This is almost certainly associated with the relative stability of the teaching role. To put this another way, the tutoring role has undergone greater scrutiny and change than the teaching role and has been invested with substantial expectations in terms of improved student outcomes.

Hastings College

Where specialist teaching skills have been developed, they tend to be directed towards the teaching of students with particular needs. Thus, at Hastings, student drop-out was associated particularly with basic skills needs. On behalf of the college, the Health and Social Care programme piloted strategies to extend and embed support for basic skills. The staff development component of the strategy addressed the specialist skills of teachers, who undertook the CG9281 Initial Training for Basic Skills. Other teachers were trained in basic skills assessment and teaching (Bannister, 1996).

Adult education services

Given that most teachers in adult education services are part time, it is not surprising that the services included in the project group focused their attention on teacher development programme for part-time teachers. These had rather different emphases, however, reflecting local needs and priorities.

Kent Adult Education Service

In one of the largest AE services in the country, there were particular concerns about variations in the quality of practice by the huge cohort of part-time tutors, and consequent student dissatisfaction and withdrawal. Kent therefore created a 12-element framework of standards for teaching and learning.

The essential focus is on the student journey and building in excellence at the critical points where staff interact with students.

The framework is similar to the self-assessment criteria found in many colleges, which are in turn based on declared inspection criteria. It is, however, notable for its emphasis on shared ownership of learning activities, student participation, active learning, student motivation and joint evaluation. The Kent framework is set out on the next page with an example of the detailed standard for goal setting.

Oldham Youth and Community Education Service

In Oldham by contrast, one of the main issues was student non-completion on its modular Access course. As part of a comprehensive set of measures to improve retention, a major development programme for part-time teachers was introduced. The programme had three main elements:

- a requirement for all staff to achieve a recognised teaching qualification (e.g. CG7307)
- general skills development for all staff on assessment practice (linked to TDLB standards) and on the teaching of study skills
- additional skills development in designing and leading group work and facilitation was made available to teachers with needs identified through student evaluation and/or in-house inspection.

In addition, part-time teachers are paid to attend two staff development sessions each year.

Croydon Continuing Education and Training Service

Croydon Continuing Education and Training Service conducted lengthy and detailed research into student retention and persistence, piloting unitisation and absence monitoring and follow-up strategies in its large modern languages programme. It concluded that some specific teacher training initiatives should be linked to a retention clause in teacher contracts and changes in staff selection procedures, and supported by managerial action (Vick, 1997). The policy recommendations are set out below:

- *Staff training sessions should be used to raise staff awareness of the funding and other implications of drop-out and their personal responsibilities for student retention. Reasons for drop-out, its warning signs, measures for prevention, importance of course social aspects and classroom management should all be brought to the fore in training.*

- *Tutors should include some well-prepared, structured, tutor-delivered teaching in every class session in a form appropriate to the subject and learners, such as interactive lecture or demonstration, and no class should consist solely of a workshop-session.*

- *New staff teaching appointments should favour well-qualified applicants who are well-motivated and enthusiastic and have a willingness to undertake appropriate on-going training.*

- *To raise the profile of retention and to foster a CETS climate of attention to such matters, a student retention clause should be included in all tutor contracts.*

- *Acceptable levels of retention must be a condition of re-issue of sessional tutor contracts so that a course with unacceptably high levels of drop-out in two successive years should not be run again in the same form by the same tutor.*

- *All managers must encourage a climate of openness and responsibility regarding drop-out and customer satisfaction among tutors and other staff. They must lead by accepting joint ownership of the problem, discussing it openly and acknowledging implications of poor retention. They must avoid running courses to completion where drop-out has been high and must not run courses with an expectation of high drop-out.*

- *Managers must assist tutors with methods to encourage retention, to include the social aspects of AE, classroom management, and appropriate and varied methods of teaching. Managers must study the methods of tutors for whom drop-out is very low, share such methods with others and use such tutors as mentors for others with high drop-out.*

- *In order for staff to understand the needs and expectations of students and the pressures of the mode of part-time courses, all staff should be encouraged to consume their own product by enrolling in one or more AE courses.*

  (Vick, 1997)

Figure 3: Kent Adult Education Service: Teaching/Learning Framework

Planning

Guidance
The students identify and understand the opportunities available to them.
Planning
The courses and sessions are planned effectively and flexibly.
Goal setting
The goals of the lesson are clear, understood and negotiated.
Materials and resources
Materials and resources are suitable, well organised and of good quality.

Development

Relationships/participation
There are positive relationships among learners and tutor and participants, and involvement by all students.
Activities
Activities are varied, stimulating, appropriate and aid learning.
Equal opportunities
The students are treated equitably and have equal opportunity to learn.
Level and pace
The level and pace of the session are matched to student abilities.
Achievement
Levels of knowledge, understanding and skills are developed and applied.
Competence and motivation to learn
The students develop competence as learners and are motivated to learn.

Review

Progress/assessment
Progress is regularly monitored/assessed and/or accredited.

Evaluation
The lessons are clearly and jointly evaluated.

Example of a detailed standard: goal setting

The goals of the lesson are clear, understood and negotiated

Guidance
There should be a common sense of direction and intention shared by the students and teacher
Students should be able to influence/change goals by negotiation

Key questions
- What are the students **aiming** to achieve in the lesson?
- Are the goals **expressed clearly** and understood by the students?
- Are the goals **expressed in terms** of knowledge, skills, understanding?
- How have the students **contributed** to the learning goals?

Typical evidence
- lesson plans
- goals displayed/articulated
- students reiterate goals
- feedback

Kensington and Chelsea College

Kensington and Chelsea College, an FE college specialising in adult learners, has taken a multi-layered approach to improving retention. Staff development, has entailed training for managers to consider issues at the programme-planning level and their responsibilities to staff and students. Training for staff has concentrated on practical approaches. The college has placed particular emphasis on understanding the complex reasons why some students under-perform or find it difficult to complete their studies. For this reason, all training has also attempted to increase staff awareness of the wider social context in which they and their students are working. Tutor training has required staff to reflect on their own experiences of being a pupil/student, positive and bad learning situations and the consequences that these have had for them. Lecturers have then been asked to share good practice and develop partnerships to support each other. Staff with very good retention rates have been linked to others. This pairing of experienced and less experienced staff has developed from established practice in the college's staff induction and teaching observation schemes.

The Kensington and Chelsea College staff development approach thus combined:

- separate but complementary activities for managers and teachers
- an emphasis on teacher understanding and empathy towards students
- a focus on the teacher as learner
- mentoring and coaching
- a comprehensive cross-college strategy to improve retention
- a clear delineation of managerial roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.

This can be illustrated by reference to the following grid developed by the vice principal at the College (Hayes, 1997). The grid summarises outcomes from the training done with some full-time and fractional staff. It was made available to all staff via the principal's monthly newsletter (enclosed with pay slips).

Figure 4: Strategies for improving student retention and performance at Kensington and Chelsea College

Area	What lecturers can do	What managers can do
Set and maintain standards	• Set clear standards of behaviour for students and themselves, e.g. timekeeping. • Ensure they always meet the standards, e.g. start classes on time, meet deadlines for returning marked work.	• Ensure student induction/course handbooks define the contract and college expectations. • Monitor staff performance and always investigate students' complaints about poor teaching.
Act on student under achievement	• Be pro-active with students who are under-achieving/depressed. • Refer students to support. • Transfer students to more appropriate course/mode of study.	• Ensure staff have time and support to develop their tutorial skills. • Ensure staff are aware of services and methods of referral. • Ensure that a variety of learning programmes and modes suitable for adult learners are available. • Communicate user-friendly transfer systems to staff.
Student absence	• Develop flexible home study materials for missed sessions. • Keep in touch with students by telephone/letter.	• Develop flexible open learning materials and structures for delivery. • Monitor performance in teaching observations.
The learning community	• Value students' experience and contribution. • Plan activities to foster peer support. • Ensure opportunities for group and individual learning.	• Ensure all staff aware of good practice in adult learning. • Monitor performance in teaching observations.
Equal opportunities	• Respect individuals – course content and teaching methods reflect positive attitudes re age, sex, race, etc.	• Class observation, lecturer support, INSET, sharing good practice.
Study skills	• Provide: Induction to systems. • Referral to support. • Core study skills sessions.	• Ensure staff cover study skills in courses and know how to refer students to learning support services.
Support systems	• Induction plus ongoing process of informing and referring students.	• Ensure access to information support system for all students/staff (especially part time).

Figure 4 continued

Area	What lecturers can do	What managers can do
Management of educational challenge and personal change	• Support students through tutorials	• Provide training for tutorial/pastoral role.
Student lack of confidence	• Recognise and build on students' strengths and life experiences. • Support individual students. • Use peer group support, e.g. existing students to help induct new students. • Believe in students' abilities. • Build group identity, e.g. with trips out. • Action planning and recognising achievement.	• Provide:outreach and guidance in the community. • Welcoming atmosphere from everyone making it as easy to get on a course as it is to buy a bag of sugar. • Be aware of activities that build confidence and offer INSET and information sharing sessions for staff.
Completion of learning goals	• Produce personal action plans and follow up with student, recording outcomes. • Transfer students to alternative modes of course completion if necessary.	• Modularisation. • Flexible options within the course, e.g. convert to distance learning mode or part-time study.
Poverty	• Be pro-active to support and know how and where to refer students for help	• Develop flexible modes of learning. Investigate funding, e.g. ESF for travel and luncheon vouchers. • Provide support services, e.g. child care, bursaries, etc. • Make sure staff know about these opportunities and referral systems.
Inappropriate choice of course	• Provide adequate assessment and selection criteria and refer applicants to more appropriate programmes. • Support students transferring - making it easy – doing the paperwork.	• Full and clear course information • Advice and guidance system. • Professional, e.g. appointments. • Ensure systems for transfer are known to staff. (Hayes, 1997)

ACTION RESEARCH

The least expected element of staff development within this project was the effort devoted to action research and the development of research skills. This took three main forms in descending order of frequency:

- brainstorming and action planning
- research projects
- combined curriculum development and action research projects.

Brainstorming and action planning

The first form will be familiar to every reader: group problem-solving and action-planning tasks undertaken as part of a regular cycle of course review and evaluation or as a development from awareness-raising sessions. These activities require little discussion here. Slight variations from the norm can be identified at Stockport College where teaching teams were supported to go out of college for their planning sessions. At Hartlepool, Hastings and South East Essex Colleges, teachers were drawn into ad hoc working groups to research and develop solutions for particular retention issues.

Research projects

Research projects, designed to investigate the reasons for student persistence and withdrawal, and underpin future retention strategies, were undertaken in just under half of the project colleges. In some, the research was led by retention project managers.

In Hastings, and Kensington and Chelsea Colleges and Croydon CETS, research was (and in the case of Kensington and Chelsea is being) undertaken by managers within frameworks for post-graduate qualifications (Bannister 1996; Vick 1997). Issues emerging from the Kensington and Chelsea research have been used in local management decisions and staff training, as contribution to debates on national policy via a submission to the Kennedy Committee, in the publication of articles and the presentation of papers.

Lambeth College initiated a large-scale piece of research and has subsequently sponsored several curriculum managers to undertake more detailed research (see the case study in Chapter 4 on page 25).

Combined curriculum development and action research

The third type of research activity combining staff and curriculum development occurred at Knowsley and Plymouth Colleges (Knowsley CC, 1995; Taylor, 1996). These projects are summarised in some detail in *Improving Student Retention: a guide to successful strategies* (Martinez, 1997). Very briefly, at Knowsley, virtually all staff joined one or another 'retention action teams' and identified, developed and implemented action research project to improve retention. Some of the projects were research orientated, but most had a curriculum focus and included enrichment activities, learning support schemes, the development of study materials, redesigned schemes of work, etc. At Plymouth, curriculum teams developed a wide variety of projects including curriculum redesign around a group project, additional tuition for target groups of students and support 'clinics'. The Plymouth projects were supported by a small Key Statement Fund held by the vice principal. The selection criteria were essentially:

- proposal based on formative assessment to identify issues
- imaginative and innovative solutions
- local need to improve retention, particularly where student learning had been interrupted by staff turnover or illness.

Harlow College workbased learning partnership

The workbased learning partnership which Harlow College has developed with Middlesex University combines interventions to improve retention, professional learning and accreditation, action research and curriculum development in a particularly novel way.

At any one time, the College has a number of development projects underway. These are in turn supported from a budget managed by the Staff Development Manager. The maximum support is normally £2,000 but most projects receive £200–£300.

Projects can now be commissioned within a workbased learning framework accredited by the University. This means that they:

- place due emphasis on professional learning and development
- adopt a more rigorous approach to action research
- are supported by a research-based learning module

- offer accreditation opportunities to College staff
- integrate professional, curriculum and organisational objectives
- include plans in the form of learning agreements between university tutor, the College and members of staff.

Figure 5 gives examples of the first round of work-based learning projects based on College priorities and illustrates how the participants accumulate CATs points towards a university diploma, degree or masters level qualification. As an associate college of the University, Harlow staff can take advantage of a 50% discount on fees.

A new development in the workbased learning programme is the in-house staff development programme **Tutoring for Achievement** based on the premise that effective tutoring can have a significant impact on student retention and achievement. Programme tutors are being given the opportunity to look at their current practice, share materials and develop key tutoring skills. Features of the programme include:

- microtutoring class exercises
- peer evaluations
- observations of tutoring performance.

All participants have the opportunity to compile a portfolio for accreditation purposes through Middlesex University.

The Harlow scheme has the additional advantages that it accredits learning done by staff and accredits Harlow staff development programmes and processes. This is shown in Figure 7, which illustrates how credits are accumulated, typically over a two year period. The illustration also shows the relationship between the accreditation of prior learning, the planning and research-based learning modules, the project and in-house training activities and programmes.

Developing business support staff

Business support staff appear to have been included less frequently than teachers in staff development programmes. At Stockport College, customer service training was developed for support staff, particularly for security staff.

In Kent adult education service, with some 150,000 students, a particular need was identified to develop administrative staff to offer an enhanced guidance service to students. The service developed an accredited open learning pathway in partnership with the University of Kent entitled 'On the first line: guidance skills'. Staff receive a pack of open learning materials, attend three group sessions and receive on-going mentoring support. The contents of the open learning pack are set out below in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Kent adult education service open learning pack (contents)

On the first line: guidance skills training

Independent study pack

Contents
A guide for using this pack

Section One
Where to find support as you go along

Section Two
Programme summary
Programme and assessment table
Your route through the diagram

Section Three
Independent learning support materials
Keeping a learning journal
Logging case studies
Identifying and building upon your skills
Time management
Action planning

Section Four
Resource materials
Guidance: selected reading
Selected learning theory
Reflective and effective listening skills
Information skills

Section Five
Review and assessment pro formas for photocopying
Review: your learning needs and institutional issues
Case study pro forma
Time management logs
Personal action plan
Institutional action plan

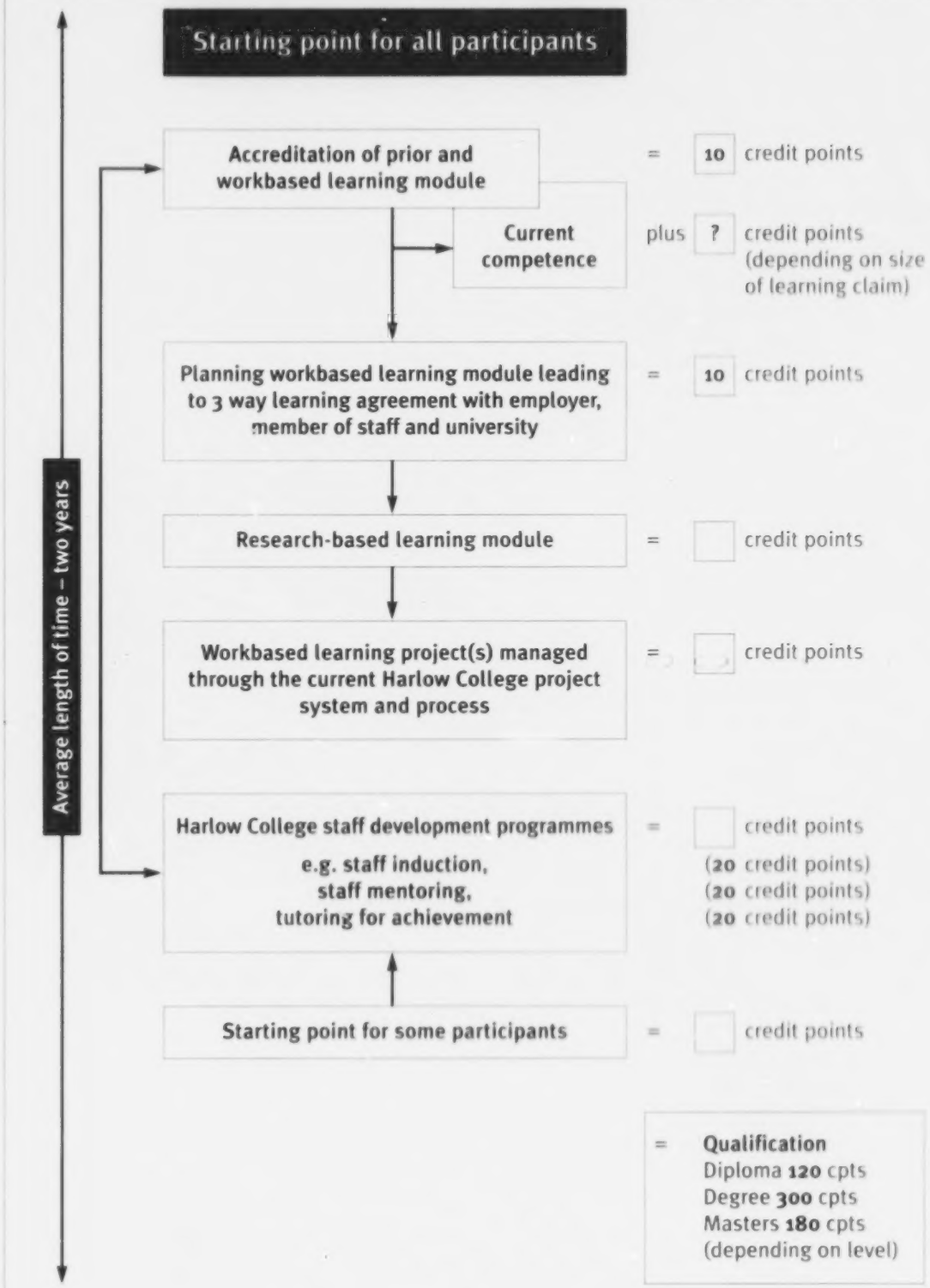
Further reading

Notes

Figure 6 Harlow College and staff development: workbased learning programme 1996/7

Participants	Start date	APL module (10cpts)	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	WBL plan (10cpts)	Research methods (20cpts)	WBL project titles	Taught modules	Award sought	Completion date
A	Aug 96	Jan 97	–	40	60	May 97	May 97	Empowerment through education (40cpts at Level 4)	None	MA WBL	Jan 98
B	Aug 96	Jan 97	30	30	30	May 97	Sept 97	Developing a model for inclusive learning (40cpts at Level 4)	Further APL (10cpts at Level 4)	MA CDT Educational	May 98
C	Aug 96	Jan 97	95	50	–	May 97	Sept 97	Student Financial Welfare: College Funded Travel	None	Management and Post Grad Diploma	July 98
D	Aug 96	Jan 97	–	45	30	May 97	May 97	A feasibility study for a Diploma in Teaching Psychology (60 cpts at Level 4)	None	MA Curriculum design, development and delivery	June 98
E	Aug 96	Jan 97	–	100	–	May 97	Sept 97	Role of the Programme Tutor and impact on student retention and achievement (40cpts at Level 4)	None	MA Education and Training	Jan 98
F	Aug 96	Jan 97	95	65	–	May 97	Sept 97	Development of Youth Training (40cpts at Level 3)	None	Diploma in HE (WBL)	Jan 98
G	Aug 96	Jan 97	–	40	60	May 97	Sept 97	Improving Student Retention (40cpts at Level 4)	None	MA Curriculum Management and Development	Jan 98
H	Aug 96	Jan 97	65	15	–	May 97	Sept 97	Client Advisers: What difference have they made to the College (60cpts at Level 3)	Further APL (50cpts at Level 3)	BA Advice and Guidance	June 98
I	Aug 96	Jan 97	70	155	–	May 97	Sept 97	1 Curriculum map for PT and a common offer for FT and PT students (60cpts) 2 Programme Leadership (40cpts)	Relevant units of NVQ4 Management Programme	BA (Hons) Management and Curriculum Planning	June 98
J	Aug 96	Oct 97	–	–	–	Jan 98	–	Fiscal audit of curriculum offer within the section (TBC)	TBC	TBC	Summer 98
K	Aug 96	jan 97	–	60	50	May 97	May 97	Programme evaluation and development (40cpts at Level 4)	None	MA WBL Programme evaluation and development	Jan 98

Figure 7 Harlow College: Routes to accreditation


Starting point for all participants
Accreditation of prior and workbased learning module
= 10 credit points
Current competence
plus ? credit points (depending on size of learning claim)
Planning workbased learning module leading to 3 way learning agreement with employer, member of staff and university
= 10 credit points
Research-based learning module
= credit points
Workbased learning project(s) managed through the current Harlow College project system and process
= credit points
Harlow College staff development programmes
e.g. staff induction, staff mentoring, tutoring for achievement
= credit points
(20 credit points)
(20 credit points)
(20 credit points)
Starting point for some participants
= credit points
Average length of time – two years
= Qualification
Diploma 120 cpts
Degree 300 cpts
Masters 180 cpts
(depending on level)

4 'Within our control': a case study from Lambeth College

Introduction

Almost all the staff development initiatives mentioned so far were employed in one form or another at Lambeth College. The College is a rich source of:

- staff development innovations and interventions to improve retention
- links between student retention and staff development
- information about the complexity of staff development issues in relation to student retention
- the learning process associated with the development of the College's retention strategies.

The context

Lambeth College is an inner-city college formed from the merger of three South London colleges and operates on five sites which spread just north of the Borough at Tower Bridge to Norwood in the very south. The most central site is in the heart of Brixton.

About two thirds of its 8,000 students are Black African, Black Caribbean or Asian – the biggest proportion being Black African, a number of whom are asylum seekers.

Most students are adults: 79% are mature students aged 20 or more.

Sixteen-year-olds in Lambeth leave school with half the national average of good GCSE passes (A-C) More than two thirds of our students live on benefit. Over 70% of our students need some form of basic skills support. Nearly half the younger students come from single parent homes.

Our strategic plan is entitled *Making a Difference*. It could justifiably be entitled 'against the odds'. By anyone's analysis it would be reasonable to describe the majority of our students as 'at risk' and they deserve the greatest respect for persevering in the face of extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Lambeth is a college committed to success, which places efforts to improve retention at the centre of its work. The staff development contribution is only one facet, but is significant and likely to become increasingly so as we try to improve the 10% additional retention achieved after three years.

Focus

The subject is potentially so broad, that we think it helpful to state clearly what our contribution is not and what it is.

It is not:

- a lengthy description of management strategies on finances, resources, accommodation, systems, staffing, etc.
- written from a senior management perspective
- a distillation of well-trodden change management theory
- a contribution to the more general debate on value added and achievement
- representative of any commonly held consensus within Lambeth about the centrality/effectiveness of staff development interventions.

It is:

- written primarily from a staff development perspective which is unashamedly influenced by Michael Fullan (1993) Graham Gibbs (1992) Ralph Stacey (1992) and Peter Senge (1990)
- a recognition that without management strategies to secure financial health and improve the general quality of life for students, attempts to transform the college will be fruitless
- a description of an electrifying journey which has just begun.

We confess that we are driven by and committed to the 'paradigm of change' as expressed by Fullan (1993). Within his metaphor of eight basic lessons needed for change, we especially relate to the following:

You cannot mandate what matters: the more complex the change the less you can force it

Change is a journey, not a blueprint: change is linear, loaded with uncertainty and excitement...

Problems are our friends: problems are inevitable and you cannot learn without them.

Individualism and collectiveness must be equal partners: there are no one-sided solutions.

Neither centralisation nor decentralisation works: both top/down and bottom/up strategies are necessary.

Every person is a change agent: enough said!

We also subscribe to:

- change rather than deficiency paradigms of teaching in FE
- the concept of the teacher as a researcher and active learner
- the idea of the college as a learning organisation with a commitment to continuous and lifelong learning (for both staff and students).

Background

The College's journey towards improving retention really began in 1993 when FEDA's predecessor, the Staff College, was commissioned to undertake some research at Lambeth. In a later interview, the Principal, Adrian Perry, explained his reasons for undertaking what was at the time an unprecedented initiative:

> *The first reason was plainly a substantial problem of retention. It seemed to me that there were social deprivation factors that would reduce retention, and the FEFC needed to hear that from respectable outsiders rather than just by assertion from colleges with a financial investment.*
>
> *Secondly, I also felt that our retention figures were out of line even with my experience in inner-city Manchester and Sheffield; I suspected this was down to poor pedagogy.*
>
> *Lastly, we did not have the expertise to analyse the problem, and students might be more likely to tell uncomfortable tales to independent researchers. It also seemed to me more likely that we would be able to confront the changes needed, if it was a neutral outsider, rather than 'The Management' pointing out the issues. At that time management was pointing out rather a lot wrong in the college.*

The results of the research were ready in 1994 and they were cascaded by managers to all staff within the college. They were contextualised and summarised, and the conclusions and follow-up actions made explicit. The cascade meetings/briefings were a new initiative by the Principal but which had so far been about cuts, funding, incorporation, restructuring, etc. This was the first example of a cascade meeting about students.

The problem was spelt out:

- Our internal information was unreliable, but our wastage was apparently well above national norms.
- This was expensive for us – we were losing as much as £100,000 for every 1% fall in retention rates.
- There was evidence of poor practice in, for example, pedagogy, programme planning, guidance and pastoral care.
- There had hitherto been a passive attitude towards the problems of the inner city.

The research findings went into considerable detail about reasons for non-completion, and similar results have been well documented elsewhere in the work of Paul Martinez (1996) and Peter Davies (1996).

In particular, the Staff College concluded:

> *... the present research supports other research findings to the effect that, while financial hardship may be an important factor, it is by no means the sole or main determinant of drop out and, in the light of the survey data, is unlikely to cause substantial non-completion except in conjunction with other factors ... [when] financial problems are compounded by the dissatisfaction with aspects of the College.*
>
> *If one word arises out of this report with a message for the College it is 'help'. Over and over again the factors discriminating between current and withdrawn students point to 'help with – course work ... getting a job ... personal problems ... getting qualifications ... with career. In all these areas, withdrawn students perceive the college more negatively than current students.'*

For many staff, who were after all in education for these very ethical reasons, this was very disappointing, and they began to debate the issue and reflect on their own behaviour and practice. The

staff began to be aware that students are clients not only in the classroom but also in the corridors, the canteen, the foyers; gone was the time that some staff had enjoyed – that of the totally autonomous teacher whose relationship with the students ended as soon as they entered the corridors again. The research thus provided a spark for debate and created a context for changes in the pastoral and welfare systems; for restocked and remodelled libraries; increased child care (two more nurseries were provided) and increased access funds.

The College's curriculum strategy was already focused on the student journey. Efforts to improve student retention became central with the introduction of a mentoring scheme, basic skills screening, the appointment of a basic skills specialist, the appointment of adult learning support specialists and the development of state of the art computer suites and new study centres. A youth worker was appointed at a Centre with a large number of 16-19 year olds and a pilot electronic register system introduced. Retention and target setting were firmly on the management agenda and the college retention target for 1994/5 was set at 70%.

It was met and for the year 1995/6 the retention target was set at 75%. Retention was by now on all middle management agendas and a Retention Focus Group was set up to help ensure that performance indicators were systematically and regularly checked and reviewed.

Classroom management

During the run up to Inspection in September 1996 the Director of Curriculum identified a need for training in 'Classroom Management'. This fell within our remit: it was to be delivered School by School (12 in all). The memory of the horror of the task which seemed to come from a 'back to basics', deficiency model still remains. Here, however, was the opportunity to verify our belief that staff battered by restructuring, meeting targets, etc, would welcome the opportunity to consider the kind of extensive work/research which had gone into school improvement programmes and efforts to improve the quality of learning in higher education.

To prepare the training, key messages were extracted for each programme area from the Chief Inspector's report for 1994/5 (FEFC, 1995). The material relating to national grades was customised for each school. The report was scanned for underlying common threads for improvement in classroom management and delivery. Extracts from local college Inspection Reports were scoured for grading outcomes and associated descriptions. Additionally, we had local curriculum reviews – and these were used. That set the framework for introducing some current thinking on improving the quality of teaching and learning – thereby improving retention. It was a start.

Figure 8: Example extracts for the Science programme area

National report

The programme area is well managed. Teaching is generally effective, but many students experience a narrow range of methods of working and are not given enough encouragement to manage their own learning (FEFC, 1995)

Local colleges

An extract from a college receiving grade 4 in the Science programme area:

The pace of many science lessons was slow and students spent much of their time copying notes from a white board. Questions used to check students' understanding and learning are often poorly focused. No account was taken of different levels of prior achievement.

Our own College

Extracts from a Science Review carried out as a precursor to Inspection:

Teaching of the highest standard was observed in dental technology ... in these lessons high standards were expected and achieved, each student was pushed to the limits of his/her ability, the teachers drew continually on their own up-to-date experience and high levels of motivation and enthusiasm were maintained.

In many other classes expectations were much lower. Students were not advised to do additional reading; ... failure to complete homework passed without comment; some lessons proceeded at an unnecessarily slow pace.

Good classroom management reminders were extracted from all the reports and our own teaching training experiences were summarised as follows:

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Essential prerequisites for classroom management

- clarity of purpose/long term aims
- clarity of short term objectives
- knowing what you are doing
- knowing why you are doing it
- knowing how you are going to do it
- knowing what outcomes are expected
- knowing how outcomes will be checked.

Ensuring interest and maintaining motivation

- clear exposition: why/what/how
- appropriate levels: the goals and tasks must be demanding enough to maintain motivation, but not so difficult that self-esteem is undermined
- 'now' achievement: motivation feeds on short-term gains and satisfaction
- progress has to be recognisable and recognised
- appropriate pacing of lesson
- variety of strategies
- assertive teaching style.

Response to training

We thought the battle-worn and the weary would kick: but the contrary proved to be true. In most sessions, staff debated the qualities of classroom practice and there were some incredibly revealing admissions of 'chalk and talk' methods still in play. There was tension, but it was a creative tension – a dam waiting to water the desert. When the provisional Inspection grades came in, without exception, those schools which resisted debate and inquiry received grade 3 and the others which had engaged with the training, received grade 2!

The second half of the session was taken up with a discussion of extracts from Graham Gibbs (1992). Surface and deep approaches to learning were contrasted. The rationale was that the contrasts would provide a basis for thinking about student expectations of teachers, and engender ideas for fostering deep approaches to learning.

Briefly these were interpreted, for the FE experience:

- **surface approach**

Students who use this approach focus attention on details of information and procedures which are acquired and memorised but not transformed into other knowledge. Such learners have closed concepts of teaching and expect the teacher to select, present and test. If this does not happen, the teacher is 'no good'.

- **deep approach**

Students who use this approach try to make sense of what is learned, of ideas and concepts, and to integrate new ideas into their learning experience. Such learners have an open concept of teachers: they want them to facilitate learning but are able and willing to learn independently. Appropriate course design, teaching methods and assessment can foster a deep approach.

Each school was given the full extract from Gibbs' *Strategies for fostering a deep approach* which can be summarised as:

1 independent learning
2 personal development
3 problem-based learning
4 reflection
5 independent group work
6 learning by doing
7 developing learning skills
8 project work.

At the end of the session, time was given to identify groups and courses which could benefit from improved approaches to teaching and learning: for example classroom management techniques; fostering deep approaches to learning; teaching styles.

It was hoped that staff would take and extend this discussion into their course teams. This *seemed* to happen in many cases, although in retrospect it could have been monitored more closely. What did specifically arise was a request for 'more', and out of this arose discussion with the University of Greenwich on 'Improving the Quality of Student Learning' to which we shall return.

Summary of evaluations of classroom management training

Negatives

- lack of time for fuller exchange/ discussion/sharing of experiences/intake of material
- more ideas of how to deal with disruptive students would have been helpful
- more ideas on retention strategies could have been included
- what about an example of a model lesson?
- too slick
- colleagues felt under attack

Positives:

- lots of ideas for improving student motivation and retention
- information about surface and deep approaches to learning fascinating
- extracts from Curriculum Reviews very helpful
- extracts from Inspection Reports from other colleges useful
- valued the opportunity to have academic exchange on educational matters
- would like more at regular intervals
- forced me to think more positively about what happens in the learning environment
- a crystallisation of previous reading and new ideas
- thought provoking and stimulating
- would like more on the assertive teacher
- idea of study networks excellent
- well planned and informative
- liked the idea of teacher support sessions
- great to have time to reflect

Ratings on the effectiveness and usefulness of the training:

Excellent:	80%
Good:	14%
Fair:	5%
Poor:	1%

STUDY NETWORKS

In parallel to this, we were requested to propose some positive strategies to the Retention Focus Group. From Graham Gibbs, again, came the idea of the systematic introduction of study networks. This idea was prompted by reading a case study from Birmingham Polytechnic described in Gibbs (1992). All quotes are from that source.

What are study networks?

... a type of self-help group which can be formed informally or formally ...

The study network idea, not new in itself, was pursued with vigour because staff responded positively and wanted a detailed framework for something which many of them had informally in place already.

Some students arrange themselves without prompting into such groups and some are impelled to do so if they have group assignments or presentations to deliver. It is my contention that the formation of study networks should be formalised and thus become common practice. All students can benefit, not just those who have heavy input and assignment loads or who are on part-time (particularly evening) courses, although the latter two groups would be the most obvious beneficiaries.

The purposes of study networks are to:

- encourage interaction between students
- provide peer support
- provide peer motivation
- establish 'informal mechanisms to encourage attendance'
- 'keep each other going'
- fulfil 'the mutual desire to help and be helped'
- address 'the isolation of studying alone'.

How are study networks established?

- initially by course tutor
- the tutor will have to decide whether to group students by geographical proximity, subject options or other appropriate variant. (Students can change groups later if they wish).
- during induction (or within the first three weeks) team building exercises are delivered by the course tutor.

Study network team building exercise

1. An exchange of relevant information: names, addresses, phone numbers, work experience, study experience, etc.
2. A discussion involving sharing experiences and feelings about how students have managed to cope with studying in the past, survival strategies etc.
3. A simulation exercise in which students in their groups learn to share information. Could include simulated phone calls.
4. A brainstorm around the question: what practical steps can we take in study network which will help us learn? The outcomes will be displayed and subsequently typed up.
5. The creating of group action plans identifying ways in which group members are going to help each other when given their first assignment.
6. Identification of issues/problems which might tempt members to leave the course. Discussion around how to support each other at such critical points.

Initial course reviews (ICR)

Meanwhile the Retention Focus Group had put in place strategies for monitoring and following up attendance. It was considering how to share good practice and peer observation, but lacking a dynamic. The ideas which were offered by staff development allowed the Focus Group to close and gave the issue of retention back to all staff.

Staff development was asked to participate in the group and after some time clarifying how, why and who should monitor and follow attendance/retention, we realised that the discussion did not seem to be providing any strategies above and beyond the functional. The time had come to make a further contribution.

Coincidentally, in May 1996 Dr Peter Davies had presented a paper at Queens University, Belfast, entitled *Within our control? Improving retention rates in further education*. (Davies,1996). Much of the data was not fundamentally different from our college research but the inferences had a slightly different focus. In particular, the paper identified what damage limitation could be done if we could identify students enrolled on inappropriate courses, or showing signs of being unable to cope almost immediately. Our interpretation was presented to the meeting as follows: the personal circumstances of students who drop out and those who stay are not necessarily different. There are 'at-risk' students who have many characteristics of which we are aware. One of the most 'at-risk' times for these students is the first two to three weeks, for example. If we know this in advance,we can be pro-active – it is within our control.

The additional strategy which arose from this was the design of an initial course review with instructions for use. These were systematically implemented across all schools in September 1996. The version of the form which was used is set out opposite in Figure 9. The guidance issued to teams is set out below.

Initial course reviews: guidance

- *these should be conducted in the first two-to-four weeks of term one*
- *the forms should be distributed, administered by the course managers*
- *results should be collated by the course managers and discussed with heads of school*
- *individual 'at risk' students will be easily identified if they respond with one or two 'no's'. They may also be identified if responses are predominantly 'fair/poor'*
- *such students should receive immediate tutorial appointments with the course manager*
- *patterns may emerge, such as whole groups responding negatively to particular questions, in which case strategies for investigation and/or support will need to be put in place for the relevant tutors, etc.*

In October 1996 the Director of Curriculum asked for outcomes and subsequent follow-up plans and it became clear from responses that not only were students at risk of leaving being identified and followed up, but also that other issues were being raised (e.g. course arrangements and equipment) which were subsequently followed up by course tutors. It was worth noting that the students who were not sure that they were on the right course or understood course requirements; not sure whether the course was enjoyable or whether they would stay to the end of the course; did not use the form to make comments or otherwise explain their uncertainty.

Figure 9: Lambeth College Initial Course Review form

Initial Course Review

The purpose of the review is to ensure that you are on the right course for you and that you are learning as you would wish to. While the questions are about the whole course, you can use the comments box to make points about specific subjects. Any suggestions for improvement are welcomed and will be followed up. Thank you.

LAMBETH COLLEGE

Course Title:	Student name:	Course Tutor:

	Please Circle	Comments
1. Do you feel that you are on the right course?	Yes Not Sure No	
2. Do you understand what you will have to do on the course?	Yes Not sure No	
3. Do you understand how you will be assessed?	Yes No	
4. Do you find the course enjoyable?	Yes Yes, in most subjects No	
5. Do you feel you are learning?	Yes Yes, in most subjects No	
6. How satisfied are you that the atmosphere in lessons helps you to learn?	Very satisfied Satisfied Dissatisfied	
7. Do you think you will stay to the end of the course?	Yes Not sure No	
8. Do you have any suggestions about how the course might be improved?	Yes No	If "Yes", comment here

We inferred from this an 'emotional profile' of 'at-risk' students. Simply speaking, the more withdrawn, unassertive, less confident students are more likely to leave if they are absent for a few days because they are shy/embarrassed or 'cannot face it'. The pastoral role here is crucial.

The quiet, unassertive student, is also more likely to leave, unless attended to, when feeling unable to cope. This seems to be common sense, but our research has highlighted the obvious. At-risk students often just slip away without raising any alarm signals. That is why such early warning systems are key to ensuring retention by protecting our most vulnerable clients.

Further, unless staff engage in dialogue, and show immediate concern, 'care' and 'help' (to go back to the findings from the initial survey) such students are likely to leave. Dialogue with these students increases their likelihood of staying.

The impetus for the Initial Course Review came from a research paper, which gave it credence. It was instigated so quickly, we feel certain, because it came from research and accorded with reality/prior experience. We are convinced that research can provide a powerful force for change when it addresses experience.

WITHIN OUR CONTROL

Much more controversial, was the theme we adopted for the following year of staff development. Our reading of the Davies paper (1996) marked a profound watershed for the Retention Focus Group because it changed the dynamic. The ICR initiative was succeeded by something directed at the whole college, built on the classroom management training and focused on key aspects of teaching and learning. Referring to the Davies paper, we called it: *Within our control.*

Again, creative tension was stretched to the limit. How does one convey to the whole of the staff that retention is possibly within our control without simultaneously conveying the message that everything is our fault?

The solution appeared to be in describing research on effective strategies rather than offering an encyclopaedia of possible good practice. We highlighted two which had been identified by Paul Martinez in *Student retention: case studies of strategies that work* (1996).

A similar model to the previous wholesale training was adopted in the belief that it would be as well received. A significant difference was that it was delivered centre by centre, rather than school by school. Another difference was that an outside speaker made a substantial contribution, and Staff Development had a lesser input. The outside thinker/researcher was brought in to talk about re-asserting professionalism in FE. His brief was to present a national overview of the FE professional and to examine his/her future in respect of collegiality, roles and responsibilities and self evaluation and assessment.

Our staff development input drew on three perspectives:

1. There is an emotional/psychological profile of 'at risk' students which could be discovered through initial course reviews.

2. The tutorial is key to retention and tutorial practice must take this into consideration. Martinez's summary of FEDA research on the effectiveness of tutorials was heavily drawn upon (Martinez, 1996). Many staff were practising highly effective tutorial programmes, notably for example the A-level team using the value-added model designed by Spours and Hodgson (1996). Other staff responded with cynicism, however. If tutorials are key, why isn't enough time allocated? What model of tutorial should be used,? Why isn't there more training on the tutorial policy? All fair questions which highlighted the gap between aspiration and reality.

3. The third strand of the input was drawn from P. Beatty-Guenter *Sorting, supporting, connecting and transforming: retention strategies at community colleges*, summarised by Martinez (1996).

Staff were asked to evaluate the sessions and to produce suggested strategies for retention.

The evaluations were far less positive than the first round with nearly 48% noting that the usefulness of the events was fair to poor, and a certain cynicism being expressed about whether management would take heed of any strategies put forward. We feel fairly sure that this was because the training was not contextualised within the schools as the previous whole-college training had been. With hindsight, we should have looked at the statistical data within each school, and customised the input accordingly.

While centrally designed staff development had been well received in the first instance, there was now a vociferous debate about whether it should be locally devised and be course specific in future. In a sense,

this was where we wanted to go – from a guiding/prescriptive role to one owned by staff (who are, after all, potential change agents in their own right). We were happy about this turn of events, because the groundwork had been laid. The role of research, information, academic and analytical enquiry has generally been accepted. Staff had gone through an awareness-raising stage and there was now a more creative call for information/ideas/papers.

Two further initiatives/strategies to improve retention and achievement, arose directly out of the 'Classroom Management Training' and the notion that we ought not to be operating a deficit paradigm. These were the new MA in **Improving the Quality of Student Learning** and academic tutorships.

Meanwhile the academic year was drawing to an end. Average retention was standing at 74%. The target for 96/97 was set at 80%.

MA IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF STUDENT LEARNING

There is a need within any organisation to engage in organised, job-specific, task- or system-specific learning activities to enhance skills within the organisation and the effectiveness of staff. Lambeth College, in common with many similar institutions in the pre-incorporation era, was faced with very specific training needs to cope with the new structures. However, Lambeth's problems in terms of training needs were exacerbated by the fact that it had organisational difficulties inherited from a merger of three separate institutions spread over 11 sites, each with its own culture, historical evolution and memories and teaching expertise. All these factors tended to lead to functional approaches to immediate college aims.

We needed to find structured ways in which to support staff in exploring new ideas, testing innovations, and critically evaluating practice and delivery; in other words to become action researchers in our own profession. We contacted the University of Greenwich to find out whether there was any mileage in the idea, whether we could work in partnership and whether it would be prepared to offer accreditation. We had many meetings and eventually produced a model which was experimental, exciting and, as one of us put it, 'scary'.

Developing a training model was a lengthy experience, with many false starts. As we wanted a substantive change in the perception of staff development and an emphasis on professionalism within a culture of research, we believed that such an initiative warranted the status of credits towards an MA degree. This was especially important for one school which was identified as needing support; it was believed that such an initiative would perhaps bring about a change in outlook. Having stated that we wanted a 'research culture', our own learning in this respect was slow; we were still locked into a model of delivery reliant on the development of skills into regular practice. Such a model did not fit in with the development of a fundamental shift of culture in Lambeth College, and we finally agreed on an action research model to achieve this objective.

The programme 'Improving the Quality of Student Learning', focused on the current needs of students, lecturers and the college. The approach centred on the identification of issues and problems related to improving student learning and thereby affecting delivery and ultimately, quality and retention. It was recognised that while staff may have the desire to effect improvement, they may not necessarily have the skills to undertake action research and, anyway, will need identified time and systematic support.

Two university tutors and one Lambeth tutor provided that support in the form of lectures, tutorials and group leadership. The cohort comprised 12 teachers identified by heads of schools. The course units were validated for unit accreditation towards an MA degree.

The aims of the MA were to:

- explore the nature of the learning process and improve teaching strategies
- use findings from action research to improve curriculum delivery
- use findings to improve retention
- improve the assessment processes and gain successful outcomes.

This action research model was adopted for a mixture of positive and negative reasons. Positively we contend that deeper training is needed to encourage a 'professional culture' in which teachers work together to solve problems collectively in order to recognise how learning occurs, thereby improving the quality of teaching, and achieving the mission. Learning theorists (Knowles, 1980; Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1987; Boud et al. 1993) and organisational theorists (Argyris, 1982; Senge, 1990) state that people learn best through active involvement, reflection and the articulation of what they have learned. Such models encourage teachers to be learners themselves and to experience the struggle for understanding and intellectual growth which is an essential part of learning. Teachers who use such approaches become sensitised to the nuances of the

process of learning, and to the needs of individuals and groups. They are therefore able to transfer these skills to their teaching contexts.

Senge (1990) predicts: 'the organisations that will truly excel in the future will be the organisations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learning at all levels in an organisation'. He defines a learning organisation as a place where people are continually discovering how they can create and change their reality. By allowing autonomy and space for individuals to pursue learning at their own pace and within their own interests or purposes, the learning experience will be all the deeper and more meaningful to the participant.

Negatively, the same theorists identify problems of 'blind spots' among even quite expert practitioners (Schon, 1987). Indeed, it may be the most intelligent and highly educated professionals who find it most difficult to change, or who are unable or unwilling to abandon previously successful practice (Argyris, 1982).

For our purposes, we decided to place a new emphasis on:

- teacher as learner
- teacher as change agent
- teacher as part of a collaborative work culture
- teacher as instigator of action which would improve the quality of the learning experience for the student
- rekindling the interests and concerns of colleagues and the college
- raising awareness of issues which impact on retention, teaching and learning excellence

and above all:

- developing a professional culture within the college.

Thus action research was chosen as an alternative to traditional approaches to the development of organisations or people in order to initiate a mutual learning process between staff.

An overview of the wide spectrum of topics chosen for research showed that staff were prepared to follow their own interests, or to begin new research into areas which they considered merited change. Examples of research areas are shown on the next page in Figure 10.

As a delivery model for staff development within the college, the action research approach provided a learning experience for all participants. When we introduced the concept, perhaps too much stress was placed on explaining the principles of action research, debates on possible issues of research, development of collaborative partnerships and the concept of 'critical friend'.

What we did not do (early enough) was to have the courage of our convictions, and explicitly highlight issues of learning (both personal and student). At issue here is the difficulty of balancing the centrality of action with offering staff an underpinning theoretical framework from which to proceed. We could have contextualised the MA more within previous concepts shared at the cross-college training and made learning theories more explicit.

Academic tutorships

We wanted to consolidate the many training experiences enjoyed by staff and maintain momentum on improving the quality of teacher performance. We also wanted to integrate in some way the training linked to issues of language, basic skills, ESOL, computer literacy and numeracy. We therefore decided to harness the skills of staff who conducted research in specific fields and contributed to the development of knowledge and good practice in their particular area of work. These 'experts' would work with staff to share their expertise, knowledge and skills, to develop practice within the College further.

The underpinning principles of such a model of academic tutorship can best be likened to peer coaching.

Peer coaching refers to staff working with their colleagues to shape and share perspectives on daily work. Our concept of academic tutorship although similar, has several other purposes, which reflect the organic growth of an organisational culture which promotes teacher learning through dialogue and reflection about the profession of teaching. The main aim of our model of academic tutorship is to complement existing training initiatives by providing support and encouragement, especially within the realm of portfolio presentation. The academic tutor has also been identified by senior management as possessing skills and expertise which are necessary to the College and which further its strategic plan. By working with staff to develop a notion of collegiality (i.e. working together to meet a common goal of improving the quality of the student experience), other models of support which centre around the concept of critical reflection on existing practice

Figure 10: Examples of research areas

Topic	Impact of Research for Organisation
Examination of learning styles to improve teaching strategies	• Improves teaching strategies in class • Develops knowledge base and interest of subject within the college • Improves delivery of course: with impact on retention and outcomes
Examination of whether the present NVQ curriculum meets the needs of business employers	• Puts focus on colleges as a research organisation with outside agencies • Impacts on curriculum design and delivery in-house • Curriculum design may impact on students' positive opportunities for future employment
Adapt teaching methods to meet needs of students and thus improve retention	• Improvements in quality of students' learning experience • increases retention • Producing better outcomes
Modularisation of course offer to improve more flexible delivery	• Attract more non-traditional participants to courses • Improve retention • Improve outcomes • Facilitate the accumulation of training credits and thus progression
Difficulties which Access students face in HE (comparison with traditional A- level routes of entry)	• Examines content of existing course: may involve redesign of curriculum offer • Reflects on nature of non-traditional learner: may involve introduction of alternative teaching methods • Liaises with receiving institution to establish further post-reception links
Punctuality	• Investigates reasons for lateness • Develops strategies for tutorial curriculum • Analyses personal constructs of time: cultural/ cognitive
Improving student perceptions of Computing Courses with a view to improving retention	• Analyses students' expectations • Investigates how expectations meet reality • Develops teaching methods/teaching experiences which match expectations

(through group work, peer tutoring/coaching or being a critical friend), can become established within the college.

The objectives of academic tutorship include:

- building 'communities of teachers who continuously engage in the study of their craft'
- providing a 'safe' environment where debate and discussion can occur
- developing the shared language and common understanding necessary for the study of new knowledge and skills
- building a consensus to improve curriculum and teaching methods
- providing support and follow-up for the training of new teaching skills and strategies.

Nine academic tutors were identified to develop training and support for their own particular area of work. These included:

- GNVQ
- Access (HE) provision
- Modern Languages
- tutorial curriculum
- dyslexia support
- basic skills
- key skills
- learning disabilities and difficulties.

Different tutors are working at different levels and with different priorities. Some working groups have only recently been established and have yet to formulate a cross-college strategy. The area with the greatest and longest development is the dyslexia support service which has secured quite major changes through a combination of training, investigation and research and academic tutorship.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, RESEARCH AND ACADEMIC TUTORSHIP IN THE DYSLEXIA SUPPORT SERVICE

In September 1992, after incorporation, there was no cross-college support network. The Dyslexia Support Co-ordinator returned from an ALBSU National Development Project having noted the demand for dyslexia support in all parts of England and Wales. Where support had been developed as a result of the training and development initiative, demand had far outstripped supply. Lambeth College would be no different.

The first priority was to identify the demand for dyslexia support by offering an embryonic support service. The other approach – intensive training of large numbers of staff – would have been inappropriate in the absence of other procedures and systems.

Immediate needs were to:

- establish a cross-college dyslexia support service (at that time there were eight sites)
- identify the need for the service and monitor numbers of students requiring support
- publicise the embryonic service and referral system to staff.

Subsequent developments included:

- staff awareness sessions in some departments/schools
- staff booklet of good practice in the classroom
- awareness sessions delivered by dyslexia support trainees on sites where they work
- new policies, procedures and systems for support, exam entitlement, rooming, equipment, budget, team building
- student support groups (empowerment for students to negotiate appropriate strategies within class)
- advocacy on behalt of students with individual members of staff
- development funding from CENTEC for the Dyslexic Community Project (creating a direct link with dyslexic people not in education and training).

Four years later, we have 22 members of staff providing dyslexia support within the college and support is available in all five centres. A significant revelation from the ALBSU National Development Project was that strategies which work for dyslexic students, work equally well with all students (who simply adopt them more quickly). These strategies work because of their student-centredness: cognisance is taken of the individuality of the student learning style, previous learning experience and learning skills. Such a fundamental premise underpins the training which has been introduced at College.

The Adult Dyslexia Support (ADS) Training Course was devised by the London Language and Literacy Unit, when it was part of the Inner London Inspectorate. The original course required attendance over an academic year but was subsequently rewritten as an intensive 10-week (30-hour) course, to meet the demands of new financial constraints. We later restructured the material to 15 weeks.

The ADS course was introduced to the College (in preference to others) as it best integrated the principles of student-centred learning with strategies to help learning occur. The course is accredited by the University of Greenwich and assessment is through a portfolio of evidence based on performance. This involves the full range of diagnostic testing procedures; writing a diagnostic report with appropriate conclusions and recommendations; and an accompanying learning programme constructed to meet the learning needs of the student.

The training is rigorous and demanding, with both theoretical and practical sessions requiring extensive reading preparation. The texts are complex, and often introduce new concepts to the participants. The practical 'methods' sessions involve the acquisition of new skills, such as reading mis-cue and

spelling error analysis. Staff (especially those without a background in literacy) occasionally find these tools difficult to use.

The teacher as learner and researcher

The support model for dyslexia support as advocated by the ADS training, establishes three essential criteria for establishing a successful learning programme.

1. It must be completely relevant to the students' individual needs and goals.
2. It should give immediate experience of success.
3. It should enable them to participate in and eventually take charge of their own learning.

Teachers are keen to attend this course primarily because they are hungry for knowledge and want to help students who have language processing difficulties. We would argue that successful training occurs when staff have experience of working in teaching situations they found difficult, have reflected on their personal expertise in this area/s of work, and identified their own learning needs. Also, staff are much more aware these days of the need to build up their CVs to help their marketability.

In a climate of constant change, teachers want to feel in control of their own area of professional expertise. Courses like the ADS can provide this by offering not only concrete strategies and ways of working with students, but also an academic rationale as to 'why' something should work. Early, visible success in teaching with new methods which engage students and get them coming back for more, gives staff immediate positive feedback.

The teachers who choose to come on the course, tend to be self-directed learners. From our point of view, the desired primary characteristic of a learner on the course must be their own quest for deeper and wider knowledge, based on their experience as practitioners but also informed by current educational research. To this end, the course distributes current research findings; information on recent developments is regularly shared at team meetings or informal training events.

The investigation and research model is further embedded in the assessment criteria. To be judged competent, staff must, above all, show an awareness of and engagement in the analysis of the students' learning style. Only then can a learning programme be devised to meet learning needs. If an individual staff member wants to research issues more deeply this work can count towards credit units for the MA at the University of Greenwich.

In some instances, teachers did not choose to participate on the course, but were directed to it. We found that possible resistance to new ideas had to be taken on board and any conflict between the old and new ideas accommodated. This could only occur in the following circumstances:

- a climate of respect for existing expertise and qualifications
- clarification of organisational needs and how these affect the individual
- clearly stated learning objectives and underpinning knowledge requirements
- offer of pre-course training to meet gaps in knowledge base: small group or individual training sessions form a clear progression sequence with overall goals to prepare staff for further training
- more intensive tutorial support during the duration of the ADS course.

At the end of the 15-week course, staff have already been working with students, so the final evaluation of the course (apart from course organisation) reflects on their own learning experience and practical experience of working with students. (See Figure 11 on the next page.)

Supporting and coaching teachers

The ADS course requires teachers to work with students shortly after they begin the course. The work is particularly demanding. The focus is entirely on students understanding their preferred learning style, their processing strengths and weaknesses and adopting strategies in order to overcome difficulties with particular issues. Teachers must have a wide-ranging knowledge of cognitive processing, teaching/counselling skills and strategies, in order to offer a supportive, yet rigorous programme of work. Learning programmes differ from student to student, and the content of sessions is entirely based on the student's own course work.

The appropriateness of strategies must be questioned constantly by both student and tutor. The question 'why' must always be to the fore and the success of a

Figure 11: Comments on the ADS training course

Q Have you been able to apply the diagnostic and teaching methods? What problems or issues have you encountered?

A Yes, beginning to work with students. Difficulties making time to meet students.

Q Has the course affected your classroom organisation or planning or the way you perceive the current provision?

A Yes, the course has given me a deeper perspective of support work. Hope to use strategies in whole class teaching. I need more time to work with students and get deeper understanding of issues.

Q What sort of student response have you had from the introduction of diagnostic/and/or new teaching methods?

A Good (not dramatic), but course gradually informing my approach.

Q What did you find most valuable in terms of your own personal and professional objectives?

A Basic diagnostic/assessment process of individual's dyslexia; being able to develop student-centred learning programme.

Q What do you feel you would like additional training in?

A More along these lines once I have implemented the practice a bit more.

Q Any other comments?

A Best INSET in my ten years in the college – some real training at last.

particular method of working recorded and evaluated as a focus for analysis. Students must be engaged actively in each session, which is difficult for some students and some teachers. Students, who are at the centre of the learning experience, will understand that learning has occurred when they are able to say: 'This works for me because...'

The ADS tutor has to be flexible, imaginative and innovative, especially if the repertoire of strategies does not work (which often it does not). Although there are resources, we do not use the 'off-the-shelf worksheet' approach. Many staff feel very insecure with this way of working and thus need support not only with working with students, but also with preparing their portfolio for accreditation.

To facilitate tutor support through academic tutorship, and to afford it the profile it deserves, several issues have had to be resolved, notably:

- making time for staff to meet
- giving status to the event
- ensuring that the academic tutor has the knowledge base to provide support and guidance
- negotiating part of the ongoing training
- ensuring that the academic tutorship role is not one of 'expert' to 'novice', but part of the ongoing learning process within the organisation
- empowering staff to take on responsibilities to further staff development within their teams/schools/centres, and that this is a stated and explicit principle of the academic tutorship relationship.

Dyslexia support: outcomes

The combination of direct training using the ADS course, learning and assessment which emphasises active learning, experimentation and research, and academic tutorship, has been successful in transforming aspects of student experience, teaching and the curriculum.

Specific outcomes include the following:

1. Students are more likely to stay on course and gain successful outcomes.
2. Staff are less likely to make assumptions about student learning and are prepared to encompass the learning needs of students.
3. Staff are more likely to adopt classroom strategies which are appropriate for dyslexic needs, and experiment with teaching methods which may benefit all students. For example, in some course teams, certain worksheets, exercises, or types of teaching have been abandoned or curtailed because of a new awareness of language issues in the classroom.

4. As more staff are trained they share their new ideas and practice with colleagues. As a result, teaching methodology has become more explicit, more concrete and more aware of student needs.

5. Through dialogue and discussion staff have been empowered to deal with issues around language processing difficulties in the classroom.

6. Where dyslexia support has been established over a period of time, staff have become familiar with the difficulties which dyslexic students may have, and are more likely to refer students for dyslexia or other support.

7. A bank of materials is being compiled to include strategies for right-brained learners (i.e. learners with a preference for visual and holistic learning strategies).

8. Individual and classroom strategies which work with dyslexic students, also work with non-dyslexic students (who simply learn faster). Teachers report that students are more satisfied, and that they feel more confident to address difficulties.

Some unanticipated benefits across the college have been:

- raised staff awareness of issues of language processing difficulties
- a wider repertoire of teaching strategies
- increased awareness of student learning styles and teaching styles
- enriched skills profile for staff who have undergone accredited training
- a new educational perspective for staff who were perhaps 'jaded' with their job, or felt their initial teaching training prepared them inadequately for the type of teaching required within the College
- a forum and network for educational debate and development within the College.

Some conclusions from Lambeth College

The search for strategies to improve retention has been at the heart of the change process at Lambeth, but success takes time and can only be accomplished in stages.

There is a tension between strategies driven by managers (often procedural or administrative and in the form of policies or mandates) and strategies developed by teachers or staff developers. Top-down models on their own tend to increase feelings of alienation and powerlessness among teachers.

We have found that there must be an element of risk-taking within a no-blame culture since change and suggestions for change are often deeply personal and need to be treated with professional respect and a sensitivity that recognises the integrity of staff, communicates high expectations and provides quality support.

Since change is a process, it is important to avoid the 'quick-fix', to be able to adapt/reflect, and to be slow to condemn when there appear to be glitches or when the outcomes seem further away than anticipated. Constant monitoring and re-assessment of the progress of change and the role of staff development within it need to take place.

Essentially, no matter what steps are taken to transform cultures within FE, it will be individual teachers who shape and re-shape what happens in the classroom. Staff development inputs must help to maintain that delicate balance between helping to build collaborative, transformative cultures and being in awe of the sheer skill and artistry of the current FE practitioner. Colleges have formulated mission statements, but staff must be encouraged to build on their own vision, and to participate in transformation by assuming new roles in their own development and in the education and training of their students.

Further education today is fraught with pressure and frustration on the one hand, and brimming with new possibilities of hope and success. Our own experience at Lambeth has certainly proved that it is possible to rise from the ashes.

5 Outcomes of retention strategies

Details of the full curriculum, student support and managerial dimensions of the student retention strategies are contained in the complementary guide *Improving student retention: a guide to successful strategies* (Martinez, 1997).

It is not practicable to disentangle these strategies to identify the degree of significance of any one individual component, including staff development. What is clear, is that the overall strategies produce demonstrably improved retention rates. The list below records the outcomes identified by the participating colleges and adult education services:

Bexley College

Focus: Full-time courses.

Outcomes: 10% improvement in retention rates for students with identified needs for learning support; 25% improvement in achievement rates (passes/enrolments) and 37% increase in pass rates (passes/completions) for the same students.

Croydon Continuing Education and Training Service (CETS)

Focus: 20,000 mainly part-time students on 2,000 courses.

Outcomes: 25% reduction in course closure rates over 3 years; 9% increase in retention rates in language classes where specific retention strategies were piloted.

Grimsby College

Focus: Faculty of Continuing Education.

Outcomes: Improvements of between 5% and 10% in areas where retention rates have historically been poor (e.g. GCSE evening classes).

Hartlepool College of Further Education

Focus: Full-time students in Care and Service Sector Department.

Outcomes: Over a three-year period achievement and retention rates improved across the department; very high retention rates achieved of up to 100% for two-year courses.

Hastings College of Arts & Technology

Focus: 160 students in the Health and Social Care Sector.

Outcomes: Over three years, completion rates increased from 65% to 85%.

Kensington and Chelsea College

Focus: A combination of whole college strategies and initiatives within specific curriculum areas.

Outcomes: Comprehensive pre-course advice and guidance, diagnostic testing and interview and selection procedures to identify student level have resulted in 83% retention on GCSE and 80% retention on A-level languages courses, where drop-out is a national issue.

Knowsley Community College

Focus: All full-time students.

Outcomes: Overall completion rates increased from some 75% to 82.5% (1994/5); approximately £200k income saved.

Lambeth College

Focus: 8,000 full- and part-time students

Outcomes: At incorporation, average completion rates were 66% across the college; by 1996/7 they had risen to 80%.

Loughborough College

Focus: GNVQ intermediate Business Studies.

Outcomes: In 1995/6 86% completion rates; 100% pass rate.

Oldham Youth and Community Education Service

Focus: Access courses.

Outcomes: Retention rates on 35 week advanced level courses have increased to between 58% and 60% (1995-6); the average retention rates across all 18 week courses has increased by 10% to 84%; student evaluations have been positive with high levels of satisfaction being expressed for relevance, clarity, support from tutors, enjoyment, learning, discussion and debates.

Plymouth College of Further Education

Focus: All full-time students.

Outcomes: Average retention rates across the college in 1994/5 were 78%; the target for 1995/6 was 83% and the actual was 85%; the college saved approximately £150k income.

South East Essex College

Focus: 650 full-time adult students.

Outcomes: Over one year, improvement in retention rates from 75% to 86%; reduction in the numbers of students transferring course from 13% to 8% in the same period; reduction from drop-out from Access courses from 31% to 18%.

Stockport College

Focus: 1,000 students in the school of Social, Health and Community Care (mainly part time).

Outcomes: Completion rates on first and national certificate courses increased from 71% (1995-6) to 89% (1996-7), and from 40% (1994-6) to 65% (1995-7), respectively.

Wilberforce Sixth Form College

Focus: Full-time students mainly on A-level programmes.

Outcomes: Comparing 1994/5 to 1995/6, retention in single year programmes increased from 67.9% to 72.1%; in A-levels (year 1) from 83.7% to 90%, (year 2) from 94.2% to 96.2%, in GNVQ Advanced (year 1) retention increased from 71.2% to 73.2%, and in year 2 from 67.8% to 72.1%.

6 Conclusions: staff development for student retention

A number of very different colleges and adult education services have developed and implemented strategies which have successfully improved completion rates. Staff development initiatives formed an important and integral component of these strategies. These initiatives, together with the detailed Lambeth case study, provide compelling evidence that:

- staff development interventions can succeed, even in difficult and adverse circumstances
- a mixture of self-belief and ownership of the issues is vital; at Lambeth and elsewhere improvements were premised on the belief that student retention was 'within our control'
- the content and form of the staff development varied quite considerably and were determined by an analysis of local needs and circumstances
- hard-pressed teachers will respond more strongly if staff development is contextualised and specific (e.g. classroom management at Lambeth)
- active learning by teachers is important, particularly in the application of an action research approach to curriculum management
- even experienced teachers may be interested in and excited by approaches to teaching and learning which are new (at Lambeth, for example: teaching to foster deep learning, study networks, early formative evaluation, academic tutorship, dyslexia support and accredited action research).

This prompts the obvious question: what sort of staff development?

The experience reviewed here gives considerable support to the view that colleges need to focus on professional in-house staff development for all, but particularly their teachers, if their retention strategies are going to be successful.

The content of the staff development will evidently be determined by local needs. The most comprehensive programmes reviewed here combine nine major elements: virtually all the staff development strategies for student retention fit within this model:

1 awareness raising and information giving
2 rolling programmes of teacher education and induction
3. courses to develop specialist skills (e.g. basic or special needs education, teaching key skills)
4 tutor development programmes
5 business support staff development programmes
6 peer observation, feedback, mentoring and coaching
7 professional support and leadership from curriculum managers
8 systematic teacher development programmes to address local priorities
9 action research.

This pattern prompts a number of reflections on the issues raised earlier concerning staff and professional development.

While the process for putting in place these development activities resembles the staff development decision-making model (p.9), the form and content of the activities relate more closely to models of professional development (pp8–9).

The complex and multi-faceted nature of the professional development, provides further support for the research done by Joyce (1988). To effect changes in classroom practice requires a combination of didactic teaching, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching.

Most of the staff development reviewed here was undertaken as part of retention strategies which emphasise the importance of bottom up, teacher-led innovation and change. In this sense, the context for this workplace learning was favourable.

The more sophisticated and demanding development strategies acknowledge fully the importance of teacher autonomy, individuality, motivation and understanding.

More negatively, professional development is complex, difficult and can all too easily fail. The early experience described by one of the project colleges seems to be quite common in other colleges. Despite the best efforts of curriculum managers:

- not all staff were convinced
- some teachers regarded the retention effort as a management plot to make them work harder
- not everyone accepted that specific changes were necessary or beneficial
- strategies related to the management of students were undermined when the college failed to pay equal attention to the self-management of staff and to the work of teams.

Taken together, these conclusions from further and adult education are very similar to those derived by Eraut (1994) from a review of professional development in schools:

> *effective INSET needs to be sustained and intensive and to provide individual support in the classroom. The concomitant teacher learning is a long-term process of up to two years duration involving experimentation, reflection and problem-solving. The common practice of providing inputs without follow-up is almost bound to fail, both because it underestimates by an order of magnitude the amount of support that is needed and because it fundamentally misconstrues the nature of the professional learning process in the classroom context*
>
> *Eraut, 1994 p.37*

Turning to the implementation and management of change, college experience indicates that the model described above (p.10) needs to be adapted in two ways. On the one hand, staff development is not merely one of a list of useful ingredients or a means to implement a pre-determined strategy. As far as student retention is concerned, staff development along the lines suggested here, will be a key and integral part of a college's strategy.

On the other hand, staff development without a college retention strategy will be ineffective. In large measure, the staff development activities reviewed here were successful because they were carefully planned within the context of an overall strategy, associated with a high profile managerial commitment, and could be seen to form part of a coherent set of interventions. In almost all cases, moreover, the staff development was conceived, planned and delivered only after a period of investigation and research.

Although teachers provide the main focus of staff development activity, colleges and adult education services have also developed training packages and programmes for business support staff.

It is common currency among staff developers that staff development is a difficult job and one not always appreciated by the college. Reported problems are legion but seem to boil down to two main types: teacher motivation and organisational problems. In connection with the first, it is said that teachers are too unsettled, demotivated, busy, overstretched or exhausted to interest themselves in staff development. Teachers who need development the most are least likely, unfortunately, to appear at training sessions. It is difficult, if not impossible, moreover, to get teachers to make substantial changes to their classroom practice. Small or shrinking budgets, lack of access to strategy making, demoralisation and shock caused by redundancies, or the low priority assigned to staff development are often identified as the main organisational problems.

Staff development for student retention seems to have motivated teachers, managers and support staff because it adopted appropriate methods of professional development to address issues of key significance to the colleges involved. This engaged the professional interests and enthusiasms of staff. Further, the organisational problems identified by staff developers were resolved, or at least mitigated, through the linkages between staff development and high profile strategies to improve student retention.

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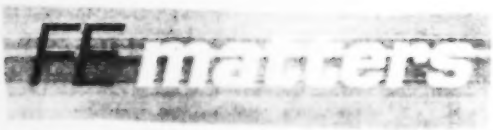

Staff development is a crucial element in any successful whole-college retention strategy but it is too often treated as a relatively straightforward affair. *Staff development for student retention* draws on the experiences of almost 20 colleges and adult education services to present detailed examples of innovative and successful work in the context of overall institutional development strategy and the 'professional' development model. It also contains a fascinating, extended case study from Lambeth College on two years' work improving the quality of teaching and learning through such initiatives as classroom management, initial course reviews and academic tutorships.

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